

Altered View: Achieving a New Perspective on Life

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Brooke Schmidtke has been inspired by the help and support she has received over the years from her family and is now pursuing a nursing career. She currently serves as a certified nursing assistant with elderly patients and feels that her personality has played a role in how she relates to them. She explained, “As a young girl growing up with Turner Syndrome, I had to grow up much faster than my peers, but I also learned so much about myself in the process. I know that I’m a hard worker, caring, and understanding and an empathetic, meticulous, non-judging person.”

She was not always as self-assured. Brooke was diagnosed at the age of five with mosaic Turner Syndrome and the doctors told her mother not to look up any information online. Her mother didn’t listen and broke down reading everything that was presented to her. This is not unusual with Turner Syndrome. There is still a general lack of awareness about this condition and what is available focuses mainly on the more negative aspects of the condition instead of showing the ways that the various issues could be remedied.

Another obstacle that came her way was finding out that she was hard of hearing. She had to wear hearing aids which made her feel different from her peers. Brooke said, "I was embarrassed to wear these because I felt out of place. It was just another issue that emphasized how different I was from the rest of my peers." Her teachers up until 8th grade wore FM systems around their necks so that she could focus on the teacher instead of the background noise. This was something that many of her classmates remember about her—the fact that she wore hearing aids. Wearing hearing aids and being shorter did not stop her from becoming involved in extracurricular activities and sports though. She played basketball and volleyball and was in Spanish club.

Her outlook on life changed after witnessing another teen with hearing aids at the mall hanging out with his friends. Seeing him so confident and self-assured made her realize that her hearing difficulties didn't have to define who she was as a person. She said, "It was then that I decided to accept who I was, because no matter how much I wanted to, hearing aids will always be a part of my life. Now I wouldn't change it at all, I love how different I am."

When she was fifteen, another issue arose when she found out that she had an enlarged aortic valve after undergoing a series of tests. She cried after getting in the car with her mother but realized during the drive home that she needed to end her self-pity and just be happy with the blessings she had in her life.

Her family has always been there for her to lean on when she struggled with each obstacle that came her way and helped to shape her into the more positive person that she is today. Brooke is now 19 and will be a sophomore in college in the fall. She has proven that with a strong support system and an optimistic perspective on life anything is possible. She wants to encourage others with this condition to feel better about themselves and said, "You shouldn't be ashamed and wanting to change who you are because there are people who love you for you. You are beautiful and don't you forget it!"

The Turner Syndrome Foundation also presents a positive outlook on life with Turner Syndrome on its website, www.tsfusa.org, which is colorful and shares resources and patients' stories so individuals with Turner Syndrome and their families can learn from the experiences of others. Patients and their family members are always encouraged to call the foundation for support at (732) 847-3385 or by emailing info@tsfusa.org.